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detail below the large shield. With Bousch's initials, his style, and the dates all pointing to one conclusion, there can be little doubt as to the attribution. Bousch drew a certain amount of inspiration from Hans Baldung Grien, one of the contemporary artists of the Upper Rhine, but his style was his own, and in the individuality and dignity given to the personages represented in the Museum windows, in the firm, free drawing of the figures and the nobility of the entire conception, the artist shows himself one of the most accomplished of the many draughtsmen and designers who in his day worked in the medium of stained glass. D. F.



MEDALLION BY VALENTIN BOUSCH

JAPANESE COLOR PRINTS: AN EXHIBIT OF PRIMITIVES

THE exhibit of Japanese prints in Room H 11 has been changed and the so-called "Primitives" have taken the place of the prints of the late eighteenth century. The word primitives is rather misleading and suggests work contemporary with the early schools of painting. The fact is that these prints date from the end of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century, and are called primitives because they are examples of the earliest Japanese color prints when the elaborate technique of the later period

had not been developed. They have all the charm of those primitive works in which the art side is not put in the background by clever craftsmanship.

Black and white illustrations are of very early origin and are known to go back as far as the twelfth century when famous temple pictures were reproduced to be carried away by the faithful in memory of their pilgrimages. Printing itself, that is, not printing with movable letters, but block printing, has been in common practice in Japan since the ninth century, and there does not seem to be any reason why illustrations and designs should not have been printed as early as letters. Writing has always been considered in the East a form of drawing and one of the fine arts; beautiful lettering is as much admired as beautiful drawing and the characters themselves were originally ideographs, simplified pictures of the idea expressed. For instance, the letter for man 人 represented a human figure with two legs; prisoner 囚 was the same figure enclosed in a square. Where these letters were cut in the wood block to be printed, there seems to be no reason to believe that more realistic human figures or ornaments should not have been reproduced at a time when actual skill was not wanting. However, the perishable sheets have not survived. The earliest book illustrations we know date from the end of the sixteenth century, when with the growing power of the Shoguns education and interest in literature rose and spread; they flourished in the end of the seventeenth century and then began to be hand colored.

It has been generally accepted that the first color prints, that is, prints made with several superposed blocks, one giving the black outline and each successive one a different color, were first made about 1743 and this on the strength of a dated print by Shigenaga. W. von Seidlitz in his book, *A History of Japanese Colour Prints*, says on page 87: "The sheet dated 1743 representing a young man in the rain, is by Shigenaga. Whether it is the first colour-print ever produced in Japan, we do not know; nor has the name of the inventor of this new process been

handed down to us. But from the circumstance that it is dated at all, forming thus one of the few exceptions among Japanese single-sheet prints, we may doubtless conclude that it was the first sheet produced in this technique, and that the youthful artist gave expression by this signature to his pride in his new invention." What von Seidlitz calls "doubtless" does not seem to be very clearly proved at all. First of all, the above-mentioned young man singularly exaggerated the importance of his invention, which was by no means new; Chinese color prints existed fully a hundred years before, and his dating the invention seems to presuppose a knowledge of the interest we would take in the subject.

More convincing is a description which Papillon gives in his *Traité historique et pratique de la gravure en bois*, published in 1766, where he speaks of color prints, probably sheets of wall paper, acquired by his father in China and Japan about 1695. He goes into the details of color printing and the blocks used and speaks of hand-colored prints and prints made with several superposed blocks; and as he was keenly interested in everything pertaining to the technique of wood engraving, his judgment can be trusted. Speaking about those squares of wall paper his father bought, he describes the design and mentions that they have been printed in different colors. Without giving the actual date when his father acquired them, he speaks of them together with hand-colored sheets bought in 1695 and makes it plain that color-printed decorative papers were in common use at that time.

It seems to me that the introduction and use of color printing in Japan was more in the nature of a fashion, of a matter of taste, than an invention. Japan was in the eighteenth century a nation at the very height of its artistic development and past master in all kinds of techniques; stencils were in common use

and the trade with China was open. There are in the British Museum Chinese color prints of flowers brought over by Kaempfer at the end of the seventeenth century. It would be uncommonly strange if the idea of copying the Chinese in this, as in other arts, had not occurred to them.

Among the prints now exhibited are several fine double sheets, big in conception and simple in line, most of them of the early hand-colored type, simply seen outline drawings touched up with color. At first they were colored with orange-red, called *tan*, a lead pigment applied in a few bold strokes. About 1715 Kiyonobu introduced the use of carmine red, yellow, blue, and violet, to which he added later so-called lacquer, in reality a green varnish applied to black surfaces to intensify their strength. This color scheme remained unchanged until the first color blocks were used. It would seem natural that the pigments so far applied with the brush were now printed on, but this was not the case. The color scheme was altogether different, which shows that it was an older technique applied to a new use. At first, two color blocks were used, one pink and one pale green, chiefly to fill in the big planes of the garments with elaborate patterns, but very soon the color spread all over the print, and yellow was added and dark green.

The prints exhibited are mostly portraits of actors in their different rôles and of women, who, like the actors, were on a low social level. It must be remembered that the Japanese color prints, however interesting they are from an artistic point of view, were made for the pleasure of the lower classes and depicted what interested them, and it was not until much later and quite at the end of the brilliant period, in the early nineteenth century, that color prints in the form of *surimono*s elaborately printed found favor with the higher classes. S. C. B. R.